



Economic and Social Council

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.6/1997/2  
7 February 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
Fifty-first session  
10-21 March 1997  
Item 3 (d) of the provisional agenda\*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN:  
REVIEW OF MAINSTREAMING IN THE ORGANIZATIONS OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Progress achieved in the follow-up to the Fourth World  
Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender  
perspective within the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                                             | <u>Paragraphs</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| INTRODUCTION .....                                                                                                                                          | 1 - 7             | 3           |
| I. PROGRESS IN THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD<br>CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND IN MAINSTREAMING A GENDER<br>PERSPECTIVE WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ..... | 8 - 61            | 4           |
| A. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council ..                                                                                                      | 8 - 15            | 4           |
| 1. Results of the fifty-first session of the<br>General Assembly .....                                                                                      | 8 - 9             | 4           |
| 2. Substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and<br>Social Council: coordination segment .....                                                            | 10 - 15           | 5           |

\* E/CN.6/1997/1.



CONTENTS (continued)

|                                                                                                                                         | <u>Paragraphs</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system .....                         | 16 - 24           | 6           |
| C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality .....                                                                        | 25 - 30           | 8           |
| D. Joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat ..... | 31 - 47           | 9           |
| 1. Assessment of the implementation of the current work plan .....                                                                      | 32 - 39           | 9           |
| 2. Joint work plan for 1997 .....                                                                                                       | 40 - 47           | 11          |
| E. Follow-up by Governments: national strategies or action plans .....                                                                  | 48 - 59           | 13          |
| F. Reported follow-up by non-governmental organizations .....                                                                           | 60 - 61           | 15          |
| II. REPORTS PREPARED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SPECIFIC MANDATES .                                                                             | 62 - 94           | 15          |
| A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by the organizations of the United Nations system .....                       | 62 - 88           | 15          |
| 1. Situation of Palestinian women .....                                                                                                 | 65 - 72           | 16          |
| 2. United Nations assistance to Palestinian women                                                                                       | 73 - 86           | 18          |
| 3. Conclusions .....                                                                                                                    | 87 - 88           | 22          |
| B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned .....                                                  | 89 - 94           | 22          |

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/6 on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, established the work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women, in particular the items to be included on the agenda of the Commission. As regards documentation for the sessions of the Commission, the Council decided, inter alia, that under item 3 (a) of the Commission's agenda a report of the Secretary-General on the measures taken and progress achieved in mainstreaming a gender perspective within the United Nations system should be prepared on an annual basis.
2. Reporting requirements contained in General Assembly resolutions 50/203 and 51/69 request the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly, through the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, on ways to enhance the capacity of the Organization and of the United Nations system to support the ongoing follow-up to the Conference in the most integrated and effective way, including human and financial requirements.
3. The present report has been prepared in response to those two mandates. Given the need for integrated reporting, mandates contained in Commission resolution 39/5 on the preparation of a joint work plan between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat are reflected in section I of the present report. Section II of the report fulfils the reporting requirements of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women and Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned.
4. The Secretary-General, in his report on the implementation of the outcome of the Conference (A/51/322), noted the understanding of the Secretariat that the report requested in General Assembly resolution 50/203 would be provided on a rolling basis. While briefly summarizing results from previous intergovernmental meetings, new material would be added to each report. Therefore, the three separate reports to be submitted in the course of a year to the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism under the broader heading of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and mainstreaming of a gender perspective would be self-standing. The complete picture of relevant intergovernmental, national-level and United Nations system activities taking place over a year, however, can be obtained only by consulting all three reports.
5. A particular effort was to be made in those reports to provide information that was most pertinent to the respective intergovernmental body in order to facilitate intergovernmental decision-making. Thus, the reports to the Commission on the Status of Women would emphasize efforts undertaken by the secretariat of the Commission in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective and other follow-up activities. They would also cover inter-agency activities and provide an overview of national action and action by civil society. Bearing in mind the need for integrated reporting, information requested under long-standing mandates or particular resolutions would be incorporated into those reports.

6. The emphasis of the reports to the Economic and Social Council would be on facilitating the coordination function of the Council. Thus, they would focus on activities in the area of the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming by other bodies reporting to the Council, as well as at the inter-agency level, with a view to supporting the Council's responsibilities in system-wide coordination in mainstreaming of a gender perspective, a task requiring the Council's ongoing and long-term attention. The Commission secretariat is assessing opportunities for including an annual thematic focus as well into the reports to the Council in order to increase their overall usefulness for intergovernmental decision-making.

7. It is intended that the reports to the Assembly should contain information from all intergovernmental bodies and United Nations system entities not reporting to the Council, including information from specialized agencies and international financial institutions. An analysis of activities undertaken at the national level by non-governmental organizations and civil society would also be provided. The reports would contain a section on means of implementation at all levels, including human and resource needs. To the extent possible and practical, reports required under specific resolutions would also be included.

I. PROGRESS IN THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE  
ON WOMEN AND IN MAINSTREAMING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE WITHIN  
THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

A. General Assembly and Economic and Social Council

1. Results of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly

8. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322) contained a section on mainstreaming a gender perspective. The report outlined the implications of gender factors for research, analysis, programme and policy development, and decision-making, and proposed a series of steps to mainstream a gender perspective. Noting that considerable experience already existed in certain areas of United Nations system activities, the report concluded that further steps were necessary to strengthen the conceptual basis for the system-wide mainstreaming of a gender perspective and its practical implications and requirements.

9. The report was in general favourably received, and the Secretary-General was invited to focus on the practical implications of mainstreaming a gender perspective. Accordingly, in its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, the General Assembly made a number of references to mainstreaming by different actors, including by States and the United Nations system, and in different areas, including the human rights of women. In particular, the Assembly welcomed the contribution of the report of the Secretary-General to translating the concept of mainstreaming into practical action, including the ongoing work to develop methodologies to facilitate the application of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes throughout the United Nations system.

2. Substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council: coordination segment

10. In General Assembly resolution 50/203, the Economic and Social Council was invited to devote one high-level segment, one coordination segment and one operational activities segment to the advancement of women and the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Accordingly, in its decision 1996/310, the Council decided to consider, at its coordination segment in 1997, the cross-sectoral theme "Mainstreaming of gender perspectives into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system".

11. In anticipation of that decision, the first steps for preparing the report of the Secretary-General on the issue were taken at the first session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (New York, 22 and 23 October 1996). A background paper on mainstreaming and coordination, prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), served as the basis for discussion. The Committee agreed on the need to further clarify the system-wide implications for mainstreaming.

12. The preliminary outline of the report of the Secretary-General for the coordination segment of the Council's substantive session of 1997 covers:

- (a) Clarification of the concept of mainstreaming a gender perspective: qualitative change from Nairobi to Beijing;
- (b) Concise overview of intergovernmental actions taken since the Fourth World Conference on Women to mainstream a system-wide gender perspective: towards a comprehensive approach to mainstreaming a gender perspective at the intergovernmental level;
- (c) Institutional requirements for mainstreaming a gender perspective, including policies, institutional cultures, incentive systems, operating procedures and gender training:
  - (i) At the intra-institutional level: administrative instructions, programme budgets, gender training etc.;
  - (ii) At the ad hoc inter-institutional level: parameters for lessons learned;
  - (iii) In the integrated follow-up to all United Nations conferences;
  - (iv) At the formal inter-agency level, in particular through the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality;
- (e) Resource allocation for mainstreaming: the need for a common base for the quantification of financial allocations;
- (f) Assessment and proposals for further action.

13. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) Women in Development (WID) Subgroup is preparing three discussion papers for the second session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, covering three aspects of mainstreaming: indicators, parameters for evaluating best practices, and policy enforcement and accountability. All entities of the United Nations system were invited to contribute to the preparation of those papers; together with a background paper on mainstreaming and coordination and additional information on specific questions that is being gathered in accordance with the preliminary outline given above, those papers will form the analytical core of the above-mentioned report.

14. A preliminary draft of the report will be reviewed at the second session of the Committee, in March 1997, and guidance is expected for the finalization of the report.

15. Any comments that the Commission as a whole or individual members in their statements may make on the issue of mainstreaming would provide valuable input into the preparations of the report for the Economic and Social Council.

B. Activities in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system

16. Since the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, steps taken in support of implementation of the Platform for Action included a number of initiatives undertaken by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat in support of mainstreaming a gender perspective.

17. Following the endorsement by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/34 of 25 July 1996, of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat informed United Nations entities of the endorsement, in particular the comments made on the plan by the Commission on the Status of Women in its resolution 40/10 and the annex thereto, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). It will be recalled that the Commission had commented, inter alia, that the United Nations Secretariat as a whole should undertake activities in the critical areas of concern, and it identified a number of Secretariat entities not included in the activities reflected in the plan.<sup>1</sup> CPC agreed to ensure, in its examination of the plan for the period 1998-2001, that the mainstreaming of a gender perspective was reflected in its individual programmes.

18. The above-mentioned communication by the Department/Division to the United Nations entities noted that the comments of the Commission required careful consideration, and would need to be clearly accounted for in the comprehensive mid-term review of the plan in 1998. It was noted that the Secretary-General had been requested to ensure the mainstreaming of a system-wide gender perspective in all United Nations activities, including in decision-making as part of the accountability of senior managers. The need for ongoing support and commitment to that task was emphasized.

/...

19. In order to support efforts by a number of entities to mainstream a gender perspective, the Division for the Advancement of Women initiated a series of meetings with the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat. During those meetings, the concept and practical implications of mainstreaming were discussed. Possible areas were identified within the work programmes of those departments that would seem to lend themselves most readily to mainstreaming efforts, including in their proposed programme budget for 1998-1999.

20. The Department of Political Affairs subsequently identified a number of steps that could be taken to ensure participation in the implementation of the Platform for Action, and to promote mainstreaming within the Department's areas of responsibilities, including the organization, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women, of workshops and seminars for its staff members. Existing collaboration between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs on compilation of data disaggregated by sex and gender impact assessments is being strengthened.

21. At the invitation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, senior staff of that Department were briefed by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women on the requirements for mainstreaming. Although difficulties were acknowledged in achieving certain goals, in particular the numerical goals of gender balance in peacekeeping missions, the importance of pursuing mainstreaming in the programmatic and policy orientations of the Department and its operations was emphasized. In a preliminary manner, ideas for conducting an analysis of one or several existing peacekeeping operations from a gender perspective were discussed with a view to developing a framework for mainstreaming in the operations of that Department.

22. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of requests to provide input and comments from a gender perspective to reports from different departments of the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. Notably, the Division contributed to the Department's work in the area of poverty eradication, and is supporting preparations for the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 in order to integrate a gender perspective into those processes.

23. Similarly, in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), a paper on gender aspects of Habitat II was prepared by the Division, which was made available at the Conference; the paper addressed the incorporation of the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women into the Habitat Agenda. The Division remains actively involved in the follow-up to Habitat II, with a special focus on mainstreaming. A paper was prepared for the World Food Summit, focusing on the gender aspects of land ownership.

24. Among activities jointly executed by several entities, cooperation continued among the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

/...

(INSTRAW) in the development of WomenWatch, a United Nations Internet site on the advancement and empowerment of women. The site will facilitate global information exchange for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action through the use of computer networking technology. It is expected to be launched in March 1997, and will be accessible via the World Wide Web, a gopher site and electronic mail. Although partial funding from extrabudgetary resources has been allocated, additional resources will be needed to implement the project. Phase one of the project will ink the Web pages of the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and INSTRAW. It will contain archival information on the Fourth World Conference on Women and other recent global United Nations conferences, providing a single on-line source for key information and data on global women's issues, and will be linked with other relevant sites on the Internet. In a later phase, it is hoped that non-governmental organizations and other United Nations entities will become active partners in the expansion of WomenWatch. A training component is included in the project. In that regard, a seminar on information technology was held in January 1997 in Peru. Training on the use of electronic networking technology, which was provided by the Division at that seminar on a pilot basis, will be developed for use elsewhere.

C. ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality

25. Following the decision of ACC, at its first regular session of 1996 (Nairobi, 28 and 29 April 1996), to establish the ACC Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, the first session of the Committee was held on 22 and 23 October 1996 at United Nations Headquarters, New York. It was chaired by the Senior Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues on behalf of the United Nations. The Division for the Advancement of Women serves as the secretariat of the Committee.

26. The Committee's terms of reference, as adopted by ACC, entrust the Committee with cooperation and coordination of United Nations system-wide efforts to implement the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as gender-related recommendations emanating from recent United Nations conferences within the purview of the system. The Committee is also entrusted with supporting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the work of the United Nations system.

27. The Committee is expected to draft an advocacy or mission statement for the United Nations system on the advancement and empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming, for adoption by ACC. The statement will identify performance indicators, mechanisms for accountability and best practices, and will develop practical tools and approaches for mainstreaming and for monitoring and implementing the Platform for Action and the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001.

28. Following its initial discussion, the Committee noted that mainstreaming was a responsibility of the United Nations system as a whole and of all staff in all policy and programme areas and in decision-making, and that responsibility for mainstreaming started at the highest level. The Committee agreed that it would follow carefully and would monitor regularly progress made throughout the

/...

United Nations system in incorporating a gender perspective in institutional structures, and in policies and programming. It also emphasized the need for the inter-agency task forces set up by ACC for integrated Conference follow-up to fully reflect a gender perspective in their work, including at the country level. It called on ACC to underline the importance of integrating a gender perspective in the work of the task forces and in subsequent activities on integrated follow-up to global conferences. Mainstreaming will be an ongoing concern of the Committee.

29. The Committee put in place a short-term and a long-term programme of work. Among the short-term areas of work are the following: interaction with ACC inter-agency task forces on conference follow-up; indicators, evaluation of best practices, and accountability; and gender balance in the United Nations system. Among the long-term areas of work are: indicators; interaction with ACC machinery; and issue-specific concerns. For example, the Committee decided to review the issues of women in the peace process, women in conflict resolution and violence against women in March 1997. At subsequent sessions, it will discuss gender training and the implementation of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, among other issues.

30. The second session of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality will take place on 5 and 6 March 1997 in New York. An oral report on the results of that session will be before the Commission.

D. Joint work plan of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat

31. In its resolution 39/5, the Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to prepare annually a joint work plan for the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women, which would help to facilitate the mainstreaming of women's human rights, and to inform the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights of the plan at their annual sessions.

1. Assessment of the implementation of the current work plan

32. In implementing the joint work plan (see E/CN.6/1996/13), the systematic exchange of information between the Division and the Centre, including in meetings between the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, continued and was expanded in the course of 1996.

33. The Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights cooperated closely during the first session of the open-ended working group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, held during the fortieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1996. The Centre also provided comments and information for the report of the Secretary-General on a comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry

/...

procedures and practices under international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations (E/CN.6/1997/4). The Division provided written information on the work undertaken at the first session of the open-ended working group of the Commission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its elaboration of a proposal for an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Division was represented at the fifteenth session of the Committee during discussion of the draft protocol to the Covenant.

34. In order to strengthen the cooperation and links between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other human rights treaty bodies, the exchange of information between the Division and the Centre regarding the work of the human rights treaty bodies serviced by them occurred on a regular basis, and included the provision of information to the experts on the work of other treaty bodies. Regular exchange of calendars of events took place to facilitate that coordination. The Division participated in the seventh meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies in September 1996. It also participated in a meeting convened by the American Association for the Advancement of Science in October 1996, which prepared a background paper concerning the revision of reporting guidelines to ensure greater gender sensitivity in reporting under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That paper was submitted to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its fifteenth session in November. The Division provided support to the Chairperson and members of the Committee in attending the joint meeting with the Committee on the Rights of the Child at Cairo in November 1996, and it joined with UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in sponsoring a dialogue between the chairpersons of the two Committees on 12 December 1996 at United Nations Headquarters.

35. The Centre made significant inputs into the preparation of a report for the Committee on ways and means, which examines the working methods of various treaty bodies with a view to enhancing the work of the Committee (CEDAW/C/1997/5).

36. The Division provided input into the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women contributed a paper to an expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, which was held at Manila from 27 to 31 May 1996.

37. The Division for the Advancement of Women has endeavoured to support the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations system with regard to the human rights dimension of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). That work will continue, especially through the Division's participation in the development of human rights guidelines and by encouraging contributions by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

38. The Division, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNFPA, convened the first meeting ever of

/...

members of all human rights treaty bodies to discuss an issue of common concern. The round table, comprising members of treaty bodies and representatives of United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations and held at Glen Cove, New York, from 9 to 11 December 1996, allowed for an exchange of views on human rights approaches to women's health in the work of all human rights treaty bodies, with a focus on reproductive and sexual rights.

39. The Division and the Centre were both represented at a meeting on women's health and reproductive rights (Toronto, 26-29 September 1996), convened by the Commonwealth Medical Association as follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the International Conference on Population and Development. The meeting provided an opportunity to highlight the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 12 of the Convention.

## 2. Joint work plan for 1997

40. During 1997, the cooperation between the Division and the Centre on the work of and cooperation among the treaty bodies, the elaboration of optional protocols and special rapporteurs will be further consolidated. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women will continue to systematically exchange information about the work of each human rights mechanism for which they provide substantive servicing. Briefing notes will be exchanged, in particular on the outcome of the sessions of treaty bodies. There will also be a number of targeted activities that are expected to support the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all human rights activities implemented by the Centre for Human Rights. Most notably, a joint project on the integration of a gender perspective into technical cooperation practices and procedures will become operational in 1997.

41. The Division will prepare a background paper on the relevance of gender in the enjoyment of rights covered by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as an input to the elaboration of a new general comment on article 3 by the Human Rights Committee for its forthcoming session, in March 1997. It will also provide input to the work on a general comment on the right to health by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and will continue to contribute to the Committee's revision of its reporting guidelines so that they reflect a gender perspective. The Division will provide a selected number of briefs on the status of women in countries whose reports are considered by treaty bodies.

42. The Division will provide information relevant to the elaboration of concluding observations/comments of the other treaty bodies, ensuring that the concluding comments of CEDAW are immediately available to the other treaty bodies, and also that relevant concluding comments are available to thematic and country-specific rapporteurs.

43. The Division will provide the Centre with targeted inputs to the work of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which will include the establishment of direct contact with the experts entrusted with the preparation of studies on systematic rape and sexual slavery

/...

during periods of armed conflict, and on human rights and income distribution. The Division will also provide information on the status of women to country-specific rapporteurs. In addition, the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women will coordinate their activities and exchange information in connection with the following mandates for which they are respectively responsible: (a) the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on armed conflict and children, and (b) reports on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned.

44. Cooperation between the Division and the Centre will be expanded and strengthened as they develop and maintain their respective Internet sites. The Centre's Web site already incorporates a number of the reports of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A link will be established from the Centre's site to the Division's CEDAW site, and vice versa, to provide for fast electronic cross-referencing.

45. The Division will contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of the above-mentioned round table of human rights treaty bodies on human rights approaches to women's health, which was held at Glen Cove in December 1996. One of the priority actions emerging from the round table is the preparation of a resource book on human rights to be used for training staff members of bodies of the United Nations in the field of human rights. It will be prepared jointly by the Division, the Centre for Human Rights and UNFPA.

46. Based on preparatory work that commenced in late 1996, a global project was elaborated and subsequently endorsed by the Board of Trustees of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, in November 1996. The project, implementation of which is expected to commence in the first quarter of 1997, aims to facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of technical cooperation practices and procedures, from the needs assessment and project formulation phases to monitoring and evaluation. The project will be implemented and funded by the Centre for Human Rights, with the Division contributing gender expertise and advice in the various stages of the project's implementation.

47. In the meantime, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights will continue to seek the assistance and expertise of the Division for the Advancement of Women for specific technical cooperation initiatives, including, as appropriate, needs assessment and project formulation missions. The Division will also continue to participate in training courses on reporting under human rights treaties organized by the Centre, as well as other ad hoc activities, such as national workshops on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Centre and the Division will also work together to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to permit the organization of similar initiatives, including training courses that seek to sensitize women and men to the rights to which women are entitled under international law.

E. Follow-up by Governments: national strategies  
or action plans

48. In the Platform for Action, Governments have made a commitment with regard to institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Platform at the national level. The importance of effective national machinery is stressed in paragraph 296. Paragraph 297 calls for the preparation of implementation strategies or plans of action by the end of 1996. Particular emphasis is placed on their comprehensiveness, the provision of time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and resource allocation or reallocation for implementation. The role of non-governmental organizations in such processes is noted in paragraph 298. The Platform also suggests improving the role of the United Nations resident coordinator system to take full account of the Platform for Action (para. 341).

49. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996, welcomed the progress made by Governments in developing comprehensive implementation strategies or plans of action, including time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring. It also urged all Governments that have not yet done so to undertake efforts in that regard in order to fully implement the Platform.

50. In a note verbale of 13 May 1996, the Secretary-General invited all Member States to provide the Secretariat with copies of their national implementation strategies or plans of action as soon as they are completed. As recommended in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6, those national action plans will serve as a basis for the preparation of a synthesized report on implementation plans of Governments and the United Nations system, which will be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in 1998.

51. As of 15 January 1997, 25 member States have complied with this request. Several others have informed the Commission secretariat that such information will be forthcoming. Although a limited number of national plans of action have been made available to the secretariat, the discussion at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly emphasized that a significant number of Member States have undertaken steps in implementing the Platform, and that many Governments are either in the process of preparing their national strategies or action plans or have already done so.

52. Based on a preliminary analysis of the national plans received to date, the following general trends can be identified. In addition to completed plans, a few of the replies received in response to the note verbale either provided a draft of a national plan or preview of a plan under preparation, or indicated that the preparatory process would be concluded within a certain period of time. The status at the national level of a few plans received was unclear (i.e., whether the plan had been adopted or endorsed by the Government, whether it had been brought to the attention of Parliament, whether it had been promulgated by decree, or a similar action). In such instances, it was not fully apparent how the process of implementation of the plan would proceed. In some cases, a plan had been prepared by the national machinery for the advancement of women without any indication of its subsequent adoption by the Government. In some cases, the implementation of the Platform is subsumed under existing action plans for the advancement of women, or will be incorporated into the next medium-term

development plan. Information was also provided on activities already implemented.

53. Many of the plans indicated that the Platform for Action had been given wide publicity in the country, had been translated or summarized into the national language, or had been disseminated by the Government or by non-governmental organizations.

54. In a number of countries, a special body or coordinating committee has been set up to guide follow-up. Several plans indicated that there would be a strengthening of institutional mechanisms, in particular of national machinery. Many of the plans have been prepared in a cooperative effort between the national machinery, Government ministries and other governmental entities at the national/local level, non-governmental organizations and actors of civil society. Many of the plans state that, although the national machinery will assume a coordinating and monitoring role, individual ministries are responsible for incorporating relevant follow-up to the Platform into their sectoral programmes. Some state specifically that mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes is to receive priority attention.

55. Few plans cover all critical areas of concern; instead, most focus on a selected number of areas or issues, sometimes choosing priorities among those. Areas most often covered are poverty, participation in decision-making, education, economy, health, violence and human rights. Few plans provide specific benchmarks or targets, or time-frames for implementation. Most commonly, benchmarks are given in the area of education and health, such as the reduction of female illiteracy by a certain percentage by a certain date. Several plans indicate that resources for follow-up to the Platform will be increased, or that such resources will be sought in future national budgets.

56. Most plans provide for a combination of legislative actions, including the reform of discriminatory legislation, with policy and programme measures, as well as targeted projects in specific sectors for particular groups of women or in particular geographic areas. Plans include the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention.

57. The importance of integrated follow-up to all United Nations conferences was mentioned. It was also stated that a particular emphasis would be placed on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. As most of the plans received had been prepared before the Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts held at Bucharest developed a model national action plan, the influence of that meeting remains somewhat limited to date.<sup>2</sup>

58. Accordingly, the Commission secretariat reiterates its invitation to all Governments to provide it with their completed national action plans. Similarly, the secretariat would welcome receiving brief progress reports on the status of plans, their implementation or any other additional information that might be available in conjunction with the national implementation process. Any completed national plans should be made available to the secretariat no later

than 30 May 1997 in order to serve as input for the preparation of the synthesized report for 1998.

59. The Commission secretariat also wishes to recall that the Directory of National Machinery for the Advancement of Women is being updated. To that end, a questionnaire has been sent to all Governments inviting them to return the completed questionnaires by 15 October 1996; the deadline was subsequently extended to 2 December 1996. To date, the secretariat has received more than 70 replies. In order to ensure that comprehensive information will be included in the Directory, all Governments are urged to return the completed questionnaires no later than 21 March 1997.

F. Reported follow-up by non-governmental organizations

60. Since the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322), a number of events under the auspices of non-governmental organizations have occurred. For example, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, an international conference on violence, abuse and women's citizenship was convened at Brighton by a consortium of non-governmental organizations from 10 to 15 November 1996. A national conference for young girls was organized at UNICEF headquarters, New York, by the United States National Young Girls Coalition on 3 and 4 January 1997. An international conference on eliminating poverty in old age was organized from 12 to 14 December 1996 in Malta by the International Institute on Ageing. An international conference on the Asia Pacific Economic Council was held on 15 and 16 November at Manila as a parallel forum during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit.

61. The Inter-Parliamentary Union will hold an international symposium at New Delhi from 14 to 18 February 1997 on the theme "Towards partnership between men and women in politics". In cooperation with Women's World Banking and the Grameen Bank, the World Bank, Citibank and UNDP will hold a microcredit summit at Washington, D.C., from 2 to 4 February 1997, with a major focus on credit for women. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, will hold an international seminar on promoting the empowerment of women through adult learning at Bangkok from 24 to 28 February 1997.

II. REPORTS PREPARED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SPECIFIC MANDATES

A. Situation of Palestinian women and assistance provided by the organizations of the United Nations system

62. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/5 on Palestinian women, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission, at its forty-first session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

63. The Commission on the Status of Women, in accordance with paragraph 260 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,<sup>3</sup> has continued to monitor the situation of Palestinian women and children. The Fourth World Conference on Women added a new dimension to that reporting when it endorsed the importance of integrating a gender perspective in all policies and programmes of the agencies and bodies of the United Nations system. With regard to the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the mainstreaming of a gender perspective would ensure that all actors involved in the monitoring of respect for human rights or in providing assistance to the Palestinian people will take a gender dimension into account when fulfilling their mandates or designing and implementing their programmes.

64. Recent social and economic developments that occurred in 1996 and that had a particular gender impact are described below. Emphasis is placed on selected new developments and trends that have not been reported previously (see E/CN.6/1995/8 and E/CN.6/1996/8).

#### 1. Situation of Palestinian women

65. When reviewing the economic and social situation of Palestinian women and respect for human rights throughout 1996, the conditions of Palestinian women living in the Palestinian self-rule areas and in the occupied territories remain of particular concern. Life in the self-rule areas has continued to be affected by measures undertaken by the Israeli authorities, including various military and economic measures, that have had an impact on social and economic development. The West Bank and Gaza Strip were entirely sealed on several occasions in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel, thus preventing workers with valid permits from entering Israel and East Jerusalem. The economy remains dominated by the detrimental impact of the occupation, in particular the labour market imbalance (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12). As a result of the loss of employment in Israel and a decline in the trade flow caused by frequent and long-term closures, the real gross national product in the West Bank and Gaza Strip declined 22.7 per cent between 1992 and 1996. The unemployment rate increased and income levels dropped. By mid-1996, the average unemployment rate was 29.2 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, nearly 60 per cent higher than at the end of 1995. The unemployment rate has been magnified by the effect of high population growth rates and the large number of young people entering the labour market every year. Since 1995, real wages have fallen about 20 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The drop in household income was partly compensated by remittances from Palestinians abroad and by drawing on resources, such as savings.

66. The economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has exacerbated the hardship of many families, in particular households with low incomes or those headed by females. It is accepted that economic distortions tend to affect the poorest groups in society most. Owing to their economic and legal status, women are affected more severely than men.<sup>5</sup> It was estimated that 40 to 42 per cent of the Arab residents of Jerusalem, for example, live below the poverty line (see A/51/99/Add.1). Women and children, especially female-headed households, are particularly exposed to poverty.

67. The economic pressure caused by the inability of the male income-earner to provide adequately for the household and the high unemployment rates among men have caused women and children to start looking for work to maintain family living levels. There is a reported increase of 8.5 per cent in the number of women in the paid labour force in 1996, whereas the male labour force grew by only 5.1 per cent over the same period. A survey also found a participation rate as high as 11.5 per cent for children, mainly boys, in the labour force, a rate that is even higher than that of women. The highest concentration of female labour is in the agriculture sector, in which 35 per cent of women work for low wages and with unfavourable working conditions. However, there is also a high concentration of female workers (32.5 per cent of all workers) in relatively well-paid professional, technical and clerical positions. It is possible that women's increased participation in the formal labour market will become a new trend in Palestinian economic and social development that therefore needs to be taken into account.<sup>6</sup>

68. During the period under review, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of movement, education, religion and expression, have been affected by various measures linked to occupation. Forms of collective punishment, such as the demolition or sealing of houses and rooms, imposition of curfews and the sealing off or closing of areas have been frequently reported, mostly in retaliation for attacks by suicide bombers (see A/51/99 and Add.1, 2 and 3). All population groups are affected by such measures, but some target women in particular. For example, since many Palestinian women work in the agricultural sector they are particularly affected by the land seizure, loss of water utilization and other economic and social repercussions of Israeli settlement (see A/51/135).

69. Another punishment that affects women was the confiscation of the identity cards of wives of Jerusalem residents who live abroad, and who under Israeli law lose their identity card if they leave the city for more than seven years (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 215). Civilians have been exposed to harassment and physical ill-treatment. Palestinians, including women in labour, have been reported to be denied access to medical treatment in specialized hospitals (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 167). It has also been noted that Palestinian women have been humiliated and harassed during raids on their homes. There have been continuing problems regarding Palestinian women detainees in Israeli prisons who have not yet been released in accordance with Israeli-Palestinian agreements (see A/51/99/Add.1, paras. 322 and 327).

70. The field of education continues to represent a major challenge to the Palestinian Authority and the donor community. With population growth for 1996 expected to be close to 6 per cent, the continuing provision of quality education for all boys and girls is of concern. It has been projected that 858 elementary schools and the same number of secondary schools would need to be built by the year 2000 to cater for the school-age population (see UNCTAD/ECDC/SEV/12, table IV-4). Frequent closures of the self-rule areas in 1996 have again prevented students and teachers from reaching their schools. As a result of those and similar measures during the Intifadah, which have been aggravated by conditions of overcrowding and lack of teaching materials, the educational achievements of Palestinians are jeopardized. Women and girls are being particularly affected, which has contributed to the fact that the illiteracy rate of Palestinian women remains higher than that of Palestinian

men. In February 1996, the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics published the findings of a demographic survey conducted among 14,854 households in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem). According to the findings, 16 per cent of all residents aged over 15 were illiterate, with female illiteracy standing at 24 per cent (see A/51/99/Add.1, para. 224).

71. According to UNICEF, health conditions and provision of health services in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remain poor. The impact on the reproductive health of Palestinian women is of particular concern. Total fertility rates remain very high. For example, the average estimated total fertility rate for the period 1990-1995 in the Gaza Strip was 8.8 children per woman.<sup>7</sup> Low age at marriage, short birth intervals and lack of education are factors responsible for the poor health of many Palestinian women, in particular refugee women, of whom many are anaemic.

72. It should be noted that Palestinian women maintain a high level of participation in non-governmental organizations and women's committees. Progress can be reported on the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority has set up an intergovernmental committee under the Gender Development and Planning Directorate of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. A non-governmental organizations committee has been formed under the General Union of Palestinian Women.

## 2. United Nations assistance to Palestinian women

73. In Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/5, the Council urged organizations of the United Nations system, among others, to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women. During 1995-1996, a number of projects for Palestinian women were initiated and carried out by the United Nations system and bilateral donors, in close cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and non-governmental organizations. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/58 H, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", a coordinated, integrated and targeted programme was elaborated and is being implemented under the leadership of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (see A/51/171). Activities for women have focused mainly on health and family planning, relief and social services, education and training, collection of statistics disaggregated by sex, and support for the national machinery for the advancement of women, including training on legal literacy and the enhancement of women's role in public life.

74. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to emphasize the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the Palestine refugee community in its operations. Some 3.31 million Palestinian refugees were registered with UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as of 30 June 1996, of whom women of reproductive age and children below the age of five comprised two thirds. UNRWA placed special emphasis on maternal and child-health care as an integral part of its regular programme. UNRWA increased its family-planning services in the Gaza Strip, offering services in 120 UNRWA health centres in 1996, up from 49 in 1992. A tripartite mission of UNRWA, UNFPA and the

/...

Palestinian Authority developed in October 1995 a strategic plan and operational framework for a women's health programme, covering reproductive health and family planning (see A/51/13).

75. Education and vocational training remain a field of major activities for UNRWA. Some 49.5 per cent of the total school population and half of the 12,000 teaching staff are female, making UNRWA schools one of the first in the Middle East to achieve gender equality. Eight vocational and technical training centres offer a wide range of courses at the post-preparatory and post-secondary level, and have enrolled 1,273 women in the total of 4,624 training places. Vocational training for women has been provided in typical female jobs, such as clothing production, hairdressing and beauty care. UNRWA seeks to raise the proportion of women trainees by expanding courses more likely to attract women, such as nursing, computer science and business and office practice. Out of 943 scholarships granted to refugee pupils, 437 or 46.3 per cent were awarded to women.

76. The UNRWA programme for women in development seeks to involve Palestinian refugee women in remunerative economic activity. Some 11,000 women received training in the production of goods or management of services, together with basic business skills. Some 1,089 women supporting 8,200 dependants participated in a solidarity-group lending programme that provided credit ranging from US\$ 330 to US\$ 8,000 for refugee women in microenterprises or working as street vendors. In UNRWA's small-scale enterprise programme, offering loans for capital investment to new and expanding enterprises and working capital to established enterprises ranging in value from US\$ 1,000 to US\$ 75,000, 10 per cent of the credits were given to women. Through its special hardship programme, UNRWA provided material and financial aid to refugee families who met the UNRWA criteria of being without a male adult medically fit to earn an income and without other financial support sufficient to cover basic needs, which represented 5.4 per cent of the registered refugee population.

77. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) gives assistance to Palestinian women within the framework of a UNDP-assisted project on capacity-building in agricultural policy analysis and planning, which was formulated in 1995. Gender issues are mainstreamed into the major components of the projects: policy advice, including the preparation of a gender-sensitive agricultural development strategy; training in policy analysis and planning; institutional support; and agricultural statistics and establishing a database. Of particular significance is the establishment of the Rural Development/Advancement of Women Unit within the Department of Agricultural Policies and Planning of the Ministry of Agriculture.

78. The programme of technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the third largest in the United Nations system, following UNRWA and UNDP. The ILO activities for women have been carried out mainly as components of major ILO programmes. The Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin has developed a three-year programme for the socio-economic promotion of Palestinian women, focusing on the training of women for entrepreneurship. The ILO also carried out a study on gender and critical analysis of Palestinian law and practice

regarding women workers, and organized a training course on the promotion of women worker's rights and equality in employment.

79. The World Health Organization (WHO) has conducted a situation analysis of women's health and development. It assisted the Ministry of Health and the coordination of various providers of women's health services within and outside the Ministry in preparing a strategic national plan on the role of women in health and development. Further areas of priority are primary health care, leadership training for nurses and nursing management, training on nutrition and provision of immunization.

80. UNICEF supports strategies that promote basic education for all, health promotion and empowerment of women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Priority was given to children in underprivileged communities, especially in the rural poor communities in the West Bank and in refugee camps, while building on the capacity of local institutions to address the needs of those children and focusing on the girl child. Gender issues were integrated into programming and training programmes. The Palestinian Authority received technical assistance in prioritizing issues in women's health. In cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF finalized a multiple indicator cluster survey to provide reliable data on the situation of Palestinian women and men. UNICEF provided support for capacity-building to institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and considered the formulation of a national programme of action as an immediate goal so as to ensure political and social mobilization as well as long-term planning for children, in particular the girl child.

81. The UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) has implemented projects to foster and promote the full participation of Palestinian women in public life and in all aspects of Palestinian social and economic development. It has supported Palestinian women's initiatives through an extensive network of institutions, including the work of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling on gender sensitive amendments to legislation, the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Elections awareness-raising campaign for rural women, and the work of the Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health. It has also encouraged activities that promote a positive representation of women in audio, visual and written media. Technical assistance and staff training was provided to several women's units within the ministries of the Palestinian Authority. In addition, UNDP/PAPP has enabled Palestinian women to participate in the Woman's Observer Mission to the Election in Nicaragua.

82. UNIFEM, through partnership with non-governmental and governmental organizations, works towards strengthening the role of Palestinian women in the economy, governance, conflict resolution and peace-building. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, a project entitled "Post-Beijing follow-up operation" has been launched in April 1996, also involving four other countries of the Western Asia region (Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen). UNIFEM's goal is to promote the implementation of the Platform for Action and to assist in defining national strategies for the advancement of women. It also intends to strengthen working relations between non-governmental organizations and Governments, and to consolidate coordination and networking among non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels. UNIFEM also carries out a project for the economic empowerment of women

in Gaza, training women on how to start their own business and providing assistance for access to credit and business counselling services.

83. The World Food Programme (WFP) currently targets 6,600 households in the Gaza Strip registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs as hardship cases. The majority of those households are headed by women with a large number of dependants. WFP provides food assistance, pays special attention to primary health care, and supports two projects for pregnant women, nursing mothers and pre-school children. The programme distributes food aid as take-home family rations to encourage poor women to visit clinics and health centres operated by local non-governmental organizations.

84. UNFPA activities for Palestinian women have increased consistently since 1987, when small-scale maternal and child-health training and research was started. In 1995, UNFPA helped to establish a women's centre for reproductive health services, social assistance, legal counselling and community education in the Gaza Strip. As part of the reproductive health activities of the UNFPA Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (1996-1999) and in collaboration with WHO, support is provided to the establishment of the Women's Health and Development Department of the Ministry of Health. The projects involve, *inter alia*, training of the Department's staff on the management of reproductive health programmes, conducting research on policies, service delivery and socio-cultural aspects of reproductive health.

85. The World Bank, in its initial activities in the occupied territories, focused on emergency reconstruction and rehabilitation, and only incidentally on gender. In response to the deteriorating economic conditions, the World Bank's programme has concentrated primarily on short-term emergency assistance, with an emphasis on the rehabilitation of public works. As the Bank reports, future Bank-supported activities on strengthening civil society, education and health, will address gender issues. The Education and Health Rehabilitation Project (1995-1997) is of particular interest to women since it is rehabilitating and constructing schools for girls in Gaza. Women will also benefit from the rehabilitation of hospitals in Gaza. The Palestinian non-governmental organization project, proposed for early 1997, will seek to mobilize official and private donor funds to support the activities of non-governmental organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. Although many non-governmental organization subprojects will be demand-driven, it is expected that many projects will target women's income-generating projects and mother and child-health services.

86. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in its 1996-1997 work programme, initiated a multidisciplinary activity assessing the role of non-governmental organizations in the occupied territories and the Palestinian self-rule areas. The project focuses on income-generation, agriculture, industry and other areas, and considers prospects for networking among non-governmental organizations. The Division for Palestinian Rights within the Department of Political Affairs and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in executing their programme of work, make efforts to highlight the situation of Palestinian women and children and to involve women in various aspects of their programmes, such as inviting Palestinian women to participate as panelists in non-governmental

organization symposia and seminars, and in new training activities. In a follow-up activity to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development facilitated the participation of a Palestinian expert to its workshop on global information through computer networking technology, organized in New York in June 1996.

### 3. Conclusions

87. As regards United Nations assistance to Palestinian women, it is recommended that the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system continue to incorporate a gender perspective in their activities. A gender perspective should also be integrated into the monitoring of possible violations of women's human rights, notably the monitoring carried out by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and the Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967. In the case of the Special Committee, for example, it would be desirable to achieve a better perspective on the violations of the human rights of women and their needs and concerns by inviting more women to give oral testimonials before the Committee.

88. Women's status and potential roles in socio-economic development, their needs and interests need to be systematically considered in the preparations of overall economic and social development plans for Palestine and the Occupied Territories. While the international donor community has made a commitment to empower Palestinian women and enhance their role in society, including in public life, in leadership positions and through income-generating projects and vocational training, when it comes to programmes for macroeconomic development and market economy, gender needs are not as fully addressed. Women's increasing role in the labour market must be taken into account on a more consistent basis.

#### B. Release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned

89. A report on the implementation of Commission resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned was requested by the Commission for its forty-first session. Consequently, the Commission secretariat requested information from relevant United Nations entities on the implementation of that resolution.

90. From the four responses received by the secretariat, it was clear that there was no systematic collection of data and information on the release of women and children taken hostage in various situations of conflict around the world.

91. UNHCR pointed out that the question fell within the competence of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It also noted the difficulties in obtaining global figures since the circumstances of the detention and release of women and children hostages vary from situation to situation.

92. The Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat focused its response on the situation in Angola, Guatemala, Lebanon and Bosnia and Herzegovina. With regard to the situation in Angola, the United Nations Angola Verification Mission reported that women and children were still being taken hostage and that it was currently examining petitions relating to 11 such cases arising from the first extraordinary session of the Joint Commission devoted to Human Rights, held on 8 May 1996, and from resolution 40/1 of the Commission on the Status of Women. Information on several United Nations peacekeeping missions indicated either that there was no knowledge of such cases (as in the case of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala) or that such cases were not formally registered (as in the case of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In cases of kidnapping in Bosnia and Herzegovina, immediate investigations are carried out by the United Nations International Police Task Force. No figures were submitted, however. It was noted that the kidnapping of women and children in Guatemala was related to profit rather than to the political situation.

93. In its response, UNICEF referred to the report prepared by the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Michel, on the impact of armed conflict on children, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157 (see A/51/306 and Add.1). Although the report gives extensive information on violations of the rights of women and children, it does not provide specific information pertinent to the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflict and imprisoned.

94. With respect to the release of women and children taken hostage during armed conflicts and imprisoned, an important step for improving the situation would be for the Governments concerned to ratify without delay and to implement all relevant international instruments and Conventions, and for practical and cost-effective measures to be taken to collect information on women and children hostages on a systematic basis. Non-governmental organizations working in the field might also contribute to that effort.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 6 (E/1996/26), chap. IC, resolution 40/10, annex, para. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Subregional Conference of Senior Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Central and Eastern Europe (Bucharest, 12-14 September 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

<sup>4</sup> See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", Quarterly Report (Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories), Autumn 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See World Bank, Toward Gender Equality: The Role of Public Policy (Washington, D.C., 1995).

<sup>6</sup> See "Economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup> See World Population Prospects, 1996 Revision, forthcoming United Nations publication.

-----